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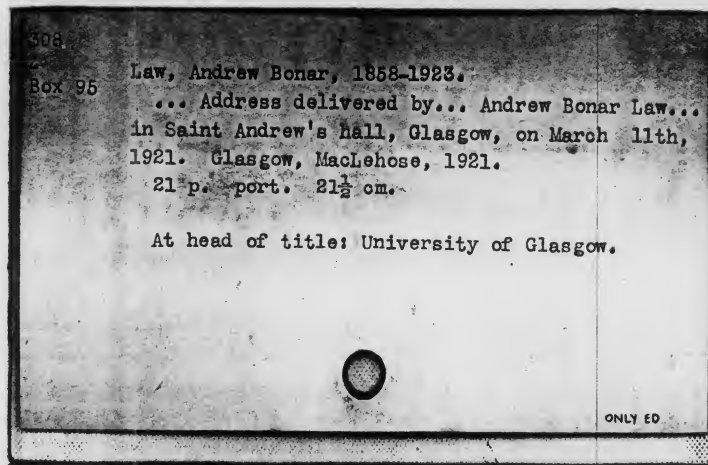
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ADDRESS

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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
ANDREW BONAR LAW, M.P., LL.D.

*Lord Rector of the University  
In Saint Andrew's Hall  
Glasgow*

on MARCH 11th 1921

Glasgow  
MacLehose, Jackson and Co.  
Publishers to the University  
1921



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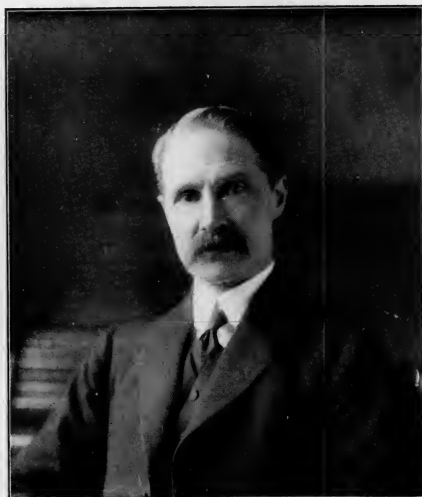
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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

It is forty-two years since, for the first time, I listened to an address by a Lord Rector of your ancient University. It was at the Kibble Palace, and the Lord Rector was Mr Gladstone. In spite of the gulf of years which separates me from that day I recall so clearly the hopes, the thoughts, and the visions by which I was then animated, that I think I have still some understanding of the aspirations of those whom I am addressing to-day. That meeting was almost my first glimpse into the great world which had lain beyond my horizon. My feelings were those attributed by the poet to the shepherd boy who became King of Israel—

“ Above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep,  
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world  
That might lie 'neath his ken, though I saw but the strip  
"Twixt the hill and the sky.”

At that time I possessed two qualities which are very commonly found in the young. I was full of ambition, which time has chastened, and I had a belief in myself, which I am sure is shared by very many of those who are now listening to me, and which experience will prove

in your case, as it has already proved in mine, to have been exaggerated. As I left that great gathering, I remember it as vividly as if it had been yesterday, I left it with the hope, and indeed with the determination, of one day occupying the position which was then filled by Mr Gladstone. I have recalled this incident, not I can assure you from any feeling of egotism or elation at the thought that one of the many day-dreams of my youth has been realised. If such a feeling had been in any case possible, it would have been destroyed by the knowledge that the realisation of that dream is the cause of the ordeal which I am undergoing now. And it is an ordeal, for though I shall not dwell upon it—and that is indeed unnecessary—the knowledge that my name is being added to the roll which contains the names of so many of the greatest men in our history is a thought which makes me not proud but humble.

It has not been possible for me to spare the time that would have enabled me to speak to you on any subject which would have demanded special study. I must therefore fall back on the attempt to interest you by giving expression to some of the thoughts on men and things which are suggested by the experience and the observations of an active life.

For this purpose I shall take, as the thread on which these thoughts are strung, ambition, and the qualities which make that ambition successful. In doing so I have not forgotten that I am addressing young women as well as young men, and that to them also I owe a

debt of gratitude for the great honour of my election. I feel sure, however, that they will remember with sympathy and perhaps with kindly commiseration that I am a man, and speak from a man's standpoint. The goal of ambition is rarely secured by the method indicated in the incident which I have related. It is true that in the biographies of famous men we find it constantly stated that they had in their youth set before them as their deliberate aim some position which they afterwards attained. That is true, but it is forgotten that the realised ambition was only one of very many ambitions which were never realised. We are all mimetic, and this is especially true of the young, whose enthusiasm is fired by human achievement of any kind, and who long to imitate any form of successful effort which for the moment fills their minds. Ambition is not realised in this way, because life is not like a well-trodden country, where all the routes are clearly mapped out, and where one has only to choose his road and walk steadily along it to the desired goal. No: life is an ocean which is and must for ever be uncharted; an ocean whose waves roll over sunken rocks and hidden shoals, where unexpected tempests arise at any moment; and each new mariner must set out on that voyage with perhaps the confidence and courage of Columbus, but with at the same time something of his uncertainty as to what he would find at the end of the journey. It is for this reason that the words of Cromwell have always seemed to me profoundly true: "He goes farthest who does not know



whither he is going." When Cromwell joined the Puritan army he had no vision, I am sure, of one day occupying Whitehall, and of ruling these islands with more than regal power; nor had he any vision either of the loneliness which made him exclaim in the height of his power: "I had rather keep a flock of sheep." It is for this reason also, I think, that great men as a rule are not so much those who foresee events as those who seize opportunities. I do not mean that foresight is not a quality essential to success. There is the foresight which judges of the trend of events, and there is the foresight also which is only another name for imagination, and without imagination there can be no intellect which furnishes a clear picture of what the position will be when certain events have happened. But just because life is an uncharted ocean, the possibilities of human foresight are very limited. History, therefore, is full of the errors which arise from confusing the present and the future. The historian has before his mind the complete picture; he sees that certain actions have produced certain results, and to him these results seem inevitable. To the actor himself it is quite different. He lives only in the present, and the whole future is dark before him. Men, therefore, are credited with an amount of foresight which they did not possess, and when the results have been favourable to their personal ambition they are accused of a Machiavellian astuteness which was absent from their minds. Indeed, in human life motives are much less complicated, are much more

simple, and there is, I believe, much less astute calculation than is generally supposed.

A man does indeed seize the tide in his affairs which leads on to fortune, but when he seizes it he has only the vaguest idea of the nature of the voyage, or of the shore upon which he will finally disembark.

I have had personal experience of two forms of human activity—in business and in public life—and in my view the qualities which secure success are not essentially different in the two spheres. It was one of the most famous of your Lord Rectors, the man perhaps of greatest intellectual endowments who ever devoted himself to British public life—Edmund Burke—who said: "I have known merchants with the sentiments and the abilities of great statesmen; and I have seen persons in the rank of statesmen with the conceptions and the characters of pedlars." This must be so, for it is true, as was said by a great Scotsman: "Neither is understanding a tool as we are too apt to figure, but a hand which can handle any tool." The industrial development of modern or at least of Western civilisation has left a wide field open for energy and ambition. The man who makes a real success in that sphere—I am not thinking of the man who accumulates wealth by the methods of the miser or secures it by the lucky *coup* of the gambler—must have great qualities, the qualities of force of judgment and even of vision. A writer who described the immense industrial development of the United States in the last century said of

the pioneers in that development: "They were men of fine physique, large brain, and tremendous force and energy. Had they lived two hundred years before, they would have become kings and dukes." If that be true, it is probably true also that they displayed some of the predatory instincts and something of the ruthless ambition which have been characteristic of conquerors in all ages. The description which I have just quoted of such men is perhaps exaggerated, but on the other hand, among those in whom the power of expression has been developed, as in the politician, for example, or the lawyer, there is likely to be an entirely wrong judgment of that type of man. Business men generally, and great men of action in wider fields, are frequently quite inarticulate; but how often is it found that such men without any conscious process of reasoning arrive with rapidity and certainty at the right decision. The power of expression is useful, for it is, I think, true that no man can speak with perfect clearness on any subject which is in the least complicated who does not think clearly also, though it by no means follows that everyone who thinks clearly can express himself lucidly. The power of clear thought is much more important than the power of expression, but beneath both expression and thought lies something else which is more important than either. It is meditation, unconscious or subconscious thought. When for the first time you visit a large factory driven by electricity, you will be amazed to see immense masses of machinery set in motion by the touching of a switch. It seems so

simple, and you will only understand it when you have examined the huge power-station from which the current flows. This subconscious thought is the great power-house of human capacity, and from it there spring these flashes of insight which are described as instinct or intuition, or are hailed as the inspiration of genius.

I have said that in every form of active life the qualities essential to success are much the same. What are these qualities, and to what extent can they be acquired? It would be idle to suggest that inequalities between men can be overcome by any exercise of free will. I am not thinking so much of inequalities of birth or fortune—these can be overcome. Indeed, the initial superiority may very often prove not an advantage but a drawback. "Talent," says Goethe, "is developed in repose, but character in the storm of the world." The boy or the young man who has everything made easy for him, who has not, for example, learned by hard experience the value of money, has missed one of the lessons most vital in the formation of character. But there are other inequalities born with us which cannot be overcome in that way. "Two children," says Ruskin, "go to school hand in hand, and spell for half an hour over the same page. Through all their lives, never shall they spell from the same page more." We cannot by taking thought add a cubit to our mental any more than to our physical stature, but just as our physical

efficiency can be increased beyond recognition by proper exercise and training, so our mental and moral stature can be developed in the same way. The first quality essential to success is hard work. Unless there has been a change since I was young, your admiration is not given in the fullest measure to the student who seems to gain his distinction by plodding industry. Your admiration goes out rather to the brilliant fellow who, it is supposed, could do anything if he liked. But these brilliant men, old or young, who could do everything are, in fact, the men who generally never do anything. It is for this reason that those who win distinction at the University are probably not very much given to letting it be known how many hours they spend in study. But this feeling is not confined to the young. The writer of verse or the artist very often likes to give the impression that his work is the spontaneous outcome of a sudden inspiration, and I have even known makers of speeches who like to hide the amount of preparation which they have given to them. All this, where it is not an affectation, is a delusion. It has been my privilege to meet many of the leading men of all the nations of the world, and whatever other differences there may be, they are all intensely hard workers.

It is constantly said that success in school or University is no guide as to the likelihood of success in after life. This is, I am sure, a mistake. It is often pointed out that men who have attained the highest University distinction fail to live up to it later, and that their

contemporaries who won no such distinction go far ahead of them. That is of course true in particular cases. Very often for many reasons a man of great force of intellect and character may not shine in the University. It may be because his development is slower, or it may be because his interests may not be centred in the special branches of study necessary to secure the prizes; but on the average the men who win distinction at the University succeed in after-life to a far greater extent than those who have not so distinguished themselves. This must be so, for the power of hard work and of concentration upon a particular object, which is necessary to win the prizes at the University, is precisely the same power which will win the prizes in after-life.

But hard work alone is not enough. The industrious apprentice who cannot see the wood for the trees, who buries himself in details, may easily become the most ineffective of men. Hard work is necessary, but it must be work in which the whole of a man's mental power is concentrated, and his brain cannot be in it unless his heart is in it also. Many learned books have been written on the nature of human motives, but one motive which inspires the wish to succeed is very simple. It is the desire innate in everyone to excel, to be thought well of by his fellows, and especially by those with whom he comes most directly in contact. There is also as a motive the desire to do his work well for its own sake which inspires

every good workman. In business the test of success is generally the accumulation of wealth. This is a poor test, for it is rarely the chief motive of those who succeed. As an illustration of what the real motive is, I will, if you allow me, relate an incident in my own business experience on the Glasgow Exchange very many years ago. I was trying to do some business with the head of one of the largest firms in Scotland. He was a friend of mine, much older than myself, and long since dead. He was the seller, I was the buyer: and I found him very stiff in the transaction. I turned to him, therefore, and said, "You are very rich, you do not spend one-tenth of your income, and I cannot understand what pleasure you get in grinding the faces of the poor in this way." His reply was, "You and I play whist together. You are always very keen to win. Is it for the sake of the stake or in order to win the game? Well I, too, like to win this game." That is largely the motive, and at all events such a man is not to be despised by those who are eagerly playing the same game but are not playing it so well. "Better far," says Mrs Browning, "pursue a frivolous trade by serious means than a divine art frivolously."

Another quality essential to success is courage. The first lesson which must be learned by every man is that where he has to act on his own responsibility he must act on his own judgment, whether that judgment be good or bad. But courage is not only essential to success. It is the foundation of all true nobility of character, for without it there can be no truthfulness and there can be

no sincerity. Courage is never lacking to any great man. It is not only the mainspring of his action, but it is the inspiration of those who work with him. What it means was well illustrated in a letter sent about Cromwell in the dark hours before Dunbar. "He was," it said, "a strong man. Hope shone in him like a pillar of fire when it had gone out in all the others."

I shall now, with your permission, speak of public life, in which for the last twenty years I have been engaged. Parliament, as its name implies, is a speaking place, and the power of speech is the key which is necessary to open the door through which success can be obtained. But the gift of speech is no guarantee of the possession of those qualities of force, of insight, of imagination, and of character which are necessary in every form of active life, but are nowhere more necessary than in the management of the business of a nation. Indeed, it is possible that these qualities are less likely to be found in the man with a natural aptitude for speech; for there is at least some truth in the saying of Froude that we all read and admire the *Philippics* of Demosthenes, but few of us remember that Philip was right, and Demosthenes wrong. Fluency of speech is worth nothing, and nowhere does it count for less than in the House of Commons. A hundred years ago the number of members of Parliament who took any part in debate was very limited. Now there are over 700 of us, and all could pass the test implied in the words of Cicero, "It is no credit

to a man to speak intelligibly, but it is a disgrace to him to do otherwise." But though fluent speech counts for nothing, good speaking counts for a great deal. Good speaking does not necessarily imply the expressing of anything striking or original. Very often the most effective speech is that which puts forward obvious arguments in a clear and well-ordered sequence, which makes those who listen feel that the speaker is expressing exactly what they think. The first essential, as I think, to good speaking is that the speaker should entirely forget himself and think only of his subject; but this is true not of speech-making alone, it is true of everything. In Parliament it is not the set speech but the debating speech which is effective. As in war the guns which may secure victory are not necessarily the biggest, but those which are placed in the best position, so in Parliament the heavier the calibre of the guns the better, but at all costs they must be quick-firing. There is a great difference between men in the facility with which they speak. Some men speak far above their general ability and others far below it, but a natural gift of speech is not necessary to secure success in public life. There have always been and there are now in Parliament men whose speaking when they began seemed hopelessly bad, but who nevertheless have taken their place in the front rank of statesmen. They did so because, as was said in a quotation I have already given, intellect is not a tool but a hand, and they used their innate intellect and force to master the tool which was necessary for their

work. In Parliament also there have always been and there are now men who, from every point of view of form or of style, make speeches which cannot be considered good; but there is in them a vital force, and their utterances, however expressed, like an electric current, convey that force to those who listen to them.

There is also, as compared with a generation or two ago, a great change in the character of the speeches of leading men. Formerly the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition thought that he completely fulfilled his duty if he made one, or at most two, speeches in the country during the course of a year. An amount of time and thought could therefore be given to those speeches which is impossible now. If anyone, for instance, reads the speeches of Disraeli delivered in Manchester or at the Crystal Palace in the early seventies he will see what an amount of labour they involved. They were not merely speeches; they were literature. Now political speeches of a public man must be largely unprepared, but the power to deliver such speeches is invariably, as I think, the result of a long training in the early stages of his career in speeches which were carefully prepared. In a sense also even now there is a kind of preparation. Their minds are working constantly, almost sub-consciously, on the subject; while they are musing the fire burns, and when they face their audiences it is that previous thought to which expression is given in words.

I have spoken of good speaking but not of eloquence. Eloquence, like genius, is a thing apart, and the eloquent man, like the poet, is born, not made. I have heard very few eloquent speeches. I have, however, listened to many very fine rhetorical speeches, but the difference between eloquence and rhetoric is as wide as the Poles. Eloquence is fire, and rhetoric even at its best is fireworks. It would not perhaps be easy to describe exactly in what the distinction lies, but, as Burke says, "No man can tell precisely the exact moment when the daylight fades into the darkness, but the difference between night and day is clear enough." Rhetoric may affect you while you listen to it, but eloquence will not only move you when you hear it, but the oftener you read it the more you will feel it, and it not only affects your emotions but it touches your imagination and your intellect. Eloquence also is always simple. There is nothing strained or mechanical about it, and it is not by piling image on image but by some winged expression that the effect is produced.

I did not propose to do this, but I will give you one or two examples that have remained in my mind of what eloquence is. The first is from the funeral oration of Pericles—a sentence from it—and it is a sentence which moves everyone at this time in the nation's history. "So," he says, "they gave their bodies to the commonwealth, and received each for his own memory praise that will never die, and with it the noblest sepulchre—not that in which their mortal bones

are laid, but a home in the minds of men." How simple, how restrained, and how majestic—their grave "a home in the minds of men." Another example which I shall take is from the speech of Abraham Lincoln on the field of Gettysburg. It was even more simple, but scarcely less grand. I hope I can remember the exact words. "We cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it beyond our power to add or subtract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it will never forget what they did here." The last example is from a speech of John Bright. It is not the speech which I am sure has gone to the minds of most of those who are listening to me in which he spoke of the Angel of Death, but it is one almost as fine. You remember that in *Macbeth*, when they are approaching the castle, they are arrested on the threshold by a bird's nest above the door, and pause to speak of it. It was the fatal castle, and this picture of repose, of calm before the storm, has always been considered as one of the master strokes of the great master. Bright in this speech had the same idea, and he showed that supreme art which conceals art. He began in simple and almost conversational language by giving an account of the meeting in a bookseller's shop in London with a member of Parliament who was going out to the Crimea, and then the climax comes like a sudden roll of thunder out of a clear sky: "The stormy Euxine is his grave; his wife is a widow, his children

fatherless." Whatever else may be rhetoric, these passages are eloquence.

Every form of government has its drawbacks, and one of the disadvantages of public life in a democratic country is the part which the limelight apparently plays in securing success; but that part is not in reality so great as it seems. In earlier ages, when autocratic power was in the hands of kings, the statesmen had to take into account the idiosyncrasies, and sometimes to play upon the weaknesses, of the sovereign. That was true even in the case of a great Queen like Elizabeth and a great statesman like Sir William Cecil. In the same way in modern times the political leader must understand the people, with whom power now rests, and he is tempted also to play upon their weaknesses; but this does not go so far as is often supposed. No man can secure, still less can he retain, the confidence of the House of Commons or of the country unless he has gained a reputation for disinterestedness and sincerity, and there is only one way in which such a reputation can be permanently retained, and that is by the actual possession of these qualities. For it is true, as has been said by some one—I forget by whom—truth and sincerity cannot be counterfeited; they are like fire and flame which you cannot paint.

I have hitherto spoken of successful men, and not specially of great men, but the history of a nation is the history of its great men, and great men are very rare. When they do appear you cannot measure them by any

footrule or account for their influence by any process of analysis. Their power, their driving force, comes from their personality. The work they do, the part they play, the success they achieve, are but the outward expression of the man; these results are only the plant of which their greatness is the seed.

So far I have spoken in a very unsystematic way, I am afraid, of success and the method by which it is to be attained, but if I have given the impression that the object of existence is the gratification of personal ambition, then that is not at all my philosophy of life, and if it were I should have been wrong when I said at the outset that I still have some understanding of the thoughts and hopes of those whom I am addressing to-day. I have said nothing either about what ought to be, and I think is, the strongest human motive—a motive which is always strongest in those who rarely think of it and never speak of it—a sense of duty. In the long agony through which we have passed we have learned how strong that motive is. In the middle of the war the Prime Minister of one of the Allied countries said to me: "Some nations fight from compulsion, some from the habit of discipline, but you British fight from a sense of duty." This is, I think, true.

In looking back upon what was done on sea, on land, and in the air, we cannot speak of it or even think of it with dry eyes. The beauty of it is that, like all great actions, it was so free from self-consciousness.

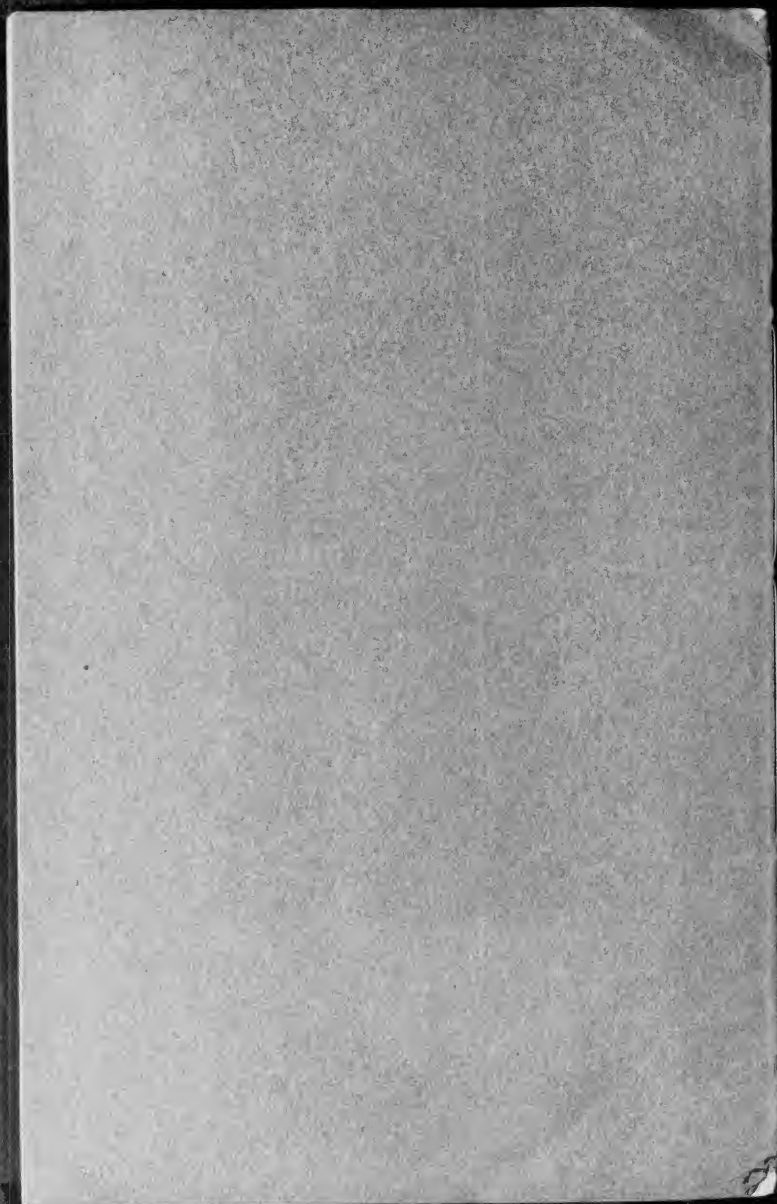


These young men did not feel that they were doing anything wonderful: they did not talk of duty: to them it was simply their day's work, and they were there to do it.

The gratification of personal ambition, if that were all, is not specially enviable. Bacon, who was himself the slave of ambition, said in his quiet way: "Certainly great persons had need to borrow other men's opinions to think themselves happy; for if they judge by their own feelings they cannot find it; but if they think of themselves what other men think of them, and that other men would fain be as they are, then they are happy, as it were by report." Great success, too, can never be obtained without paying a great price for it. The very intensity of the concentration which is necessary to secure it tends in itself to harden and narrow our natures, and to many of the most successful men the words of the psalmist apply: "The Almighty granted their desires, but He narrowed their hearts." In looking out upon life it is right that you should be ambitious, it is right that you should strive to excel, but if it were merely a selfish ambition there would be in that no "vision splendid." You have heard the saying, "Everyone with a heart is a Socialist at twenty; no one with a head is a Socialist at fifty." These aphorisms about the young are written by the old, and should be received with caution. As we grow older we do not necessarily grow wiser or better, and very often when the eager questionings of our youth trouble us no longer we flatter ourselves that

we have seen through the problems which we have no longer eyes even to see. Apart from religion, a man's relations with his Maker—of which I do not speak—the best, as I believe, that life can give consists in the main of two things. They are very simple things, and perhaps not only simple but commonplace. The first is human affection; this gives us always in our daily life a zest and interest outside ourselves. The second is work—work which in itself is worth doing, and which we can do with all our heart; and I shall conclude by quoting on this subject the words of a great Scotsman who, when I was of your age, was the inspiration of the young, and who, I still think, is worthy of the place in the pantheon of great men which Goethe gave him—Thomas Carlyle. "Man's highest and sole blessedness is that he toil and know what to toil at: not in ease, but in united victorious labour, which is at once evil and the victory over evil, does his freedom lie."





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